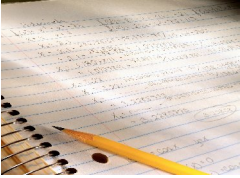


District Approaches to Improving Tennessee's High Priority Schools: *Knox County Schools*



The Office of Education Accountability reviewed three Knox County schools that have failed to make adequate progress on state assessments. The three schools serve very different populations and one of the three – Knox Adaptive Education Center – faces particularly unique challenges because of its special education student population and its alternative school status. The district continues to assist this school, and is also looking at ways to improve the magnet program in the district based in part on another school reviewed for this report, Austin-East. The district also continues to make strides in teaching quality, and is exploring innovative ways to develop quality teachers. One area of weakness, however, is administrator professional development. Knox County Schools continues to focus on student achievement, and as a result the district was removed from the Tennessee Department of Education's 2006-07 high priority list.

Report Findings:

- The district is evaluating its magnet program, in part because Austin-East Magnet High School has not attracted students.
- Despite Knox Adaptive Education Center's unique learning environment – resembling an alternative program more than a traditional school – the Center is designated with a state school code, resulting in its inclusion in all NCLB requirements.
- Though Knox Adaptive Education Center serves 100 percent special needs students and 90 percent economically disadvantaged students, the school does not receive funds for supplemental education services.
- The district has instituted a pilot teacher incentive pay plan to encourage teacher recruitment and retention in inner city schools.
- Knox County Schools is focusing on teacher professional development to assist with NCLB highly qualified requirements.
- Knox County Schools has not adequately focused on professional development for administrators.
- Austin-East High School and Northwest Middle School have experienced decreases in disciplinary actions.

"The board has determined that we need to create a strategic plan to redefine and rethink our magnet programs. It is critical that we redefine our mission [for magnet schools]...The board now understands the urgency with Austin-East in corrective action that we need a strong plan today."

*-Donna Wright,
Assistant Superintendent for
Instruction, Knox County Schools*

Recommendations for District Leaders:

- Knox County Schools should:
 - Involve officials from Knox Adaptive Education Center in regular data meetings
 - Resolve school coding decisions for Knox Adaptive Education Center
 - Use the Principal Assessment Center to develop improved professional development opportunities for administrators in the system
- The Knox County School Board should:
 - Reinvent and fund a strong magnet school system based on an evaluation of the district's magnets by the University of Tennessee

View the full report at <http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us/cpdivorea.htm>

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Comptroller of the Treasury